

John F. Kennedy
National Historic Site



ROSE KENNEDY REMEMBERS...

JOHN F. KENNEDY NATIONAL
HISTORIC SITE PRESERVES AND
INTERPRETS THE 1917 BIRTH-
PLACE OF THE 35TH PRESIDENT
OF THE UNITED STATES.



T

HIS WAS THE FIRST HOME SHARED BY THE PRESIDENT'S

father and mother, Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, and represents the social and political beginnings of one of the nation's most prominent families. In 1966, following the death of President Kennedy, the family purchased the birthplace as a memorial and restored it to its 1917 appearance under the close supervision of Rose Kennedy. It was her "intention and hope to make a gift of this home to the American people so that future generations will be able to visit...and get a better appreciation of the history of this wonderful country."

In an effort to capture Mrs. Kennedy's memories of that period, the National Park Service produced an audiotape tour of the birthplace home in which the president's mother describes family activities and furnishings, and shares personal anecdotes that convey the spirit of place. The taped narrative is a popular aspect of the guided interpretive tour and has been translated into several languages. Mrs. Kennedy's distinctly personal reminiscences provide historical context and allow visitors to imagine the early influences that helped shape the character and ambitions of America's 35th president.

John F. Kennedy National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior.



LIVING ROOM

Welcome to our home. Mr. Kennedy and I bought and moved into this house when we were married in 1914. Our eldest son was born at Hull, Massachusetts, a summer resort, but our next three children, including the president, were

born here, and this house holds many happy memories.

Life was so much simpler then. Here we had space and air for there were no houses across the street or to the right of this one. At first there were few automobiles and the trolley lines were a fifteen minute walk away. I shall try to point out to you some of the things as we go through the house that were important in our lives. Since the living room in the days before radio and television was the place for the family to be together, we shall start here.

We spent a lot of time in this room in the evening. Mr. Kennedy was president of a bank and this was his one opportunity to read the newspaper or his favorite detective stories. He would sit in that red chair by the gateleg table. We all read the Boston Transcript in the evenings in those days. Papers only cost a penny. Usually I would sit in the wing chair there by the table opposite him. I can't see that chair without remembering the holes in the children's stockings. They wore knickers then and the boys' knee stockings always had holes in them. They had to be darned once or twice a week.

When the children were ready for bed and had said their prayers they would come to the living room and play for a little while before we put them to bed. Usually after the children were tucked in, Mr. Kennedy and I would take a long walk. It was an hour we both enjoyed.

I spent a good deal of time reading to the children from books carefully selected from a list submitted by the school twice a year or from the Women's Industrial Union. I remember that I would make no engagements outside in the evening so that I could be with the children to help them with their school work, to doctor their colds, or to find out what activities they had been interested in during the day.

The piano was a wedding gift and at Christmas, with the tree over there by the south window, I would play and we would all sing Christmas carols. The children did not do too well with their piano lessons. Radio was a new thing then and they said that people wouldn't want to listen to them play when they could hear the same songs on the radio.

The pictures are copies of famous paintings I had studied in the European galleries. It gave me great pleasure to have these copies in my home and I thought it an inspiration for the children to grow up with them.

Now shall we go upstairs to the master bedroom? On the way you may want to take notice of the old-fashioned telephone in the hall.



MASTER BEDROOM

The president was born in the twin bed, near the window, on May 29th, 1917, at three o'clock in the afternoon. They always used the bed near the window so that if the baby were born in the daytime the light would be the best for the doctor.

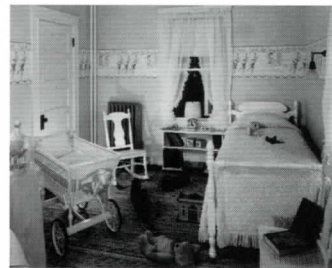
When you hold your baby in your arms the first time and you think of all the things you can say and do to influence him it's a tremendous responsibility. What you do with him and for him can influence not only him, but everyone he meets and not for a day or a month or a year but for time and eternity.

Years later, when Jack was elected president, I thought how fortunate I was out of all the millions of mothers in the United States to be the one to have her son inaugurated president on that cold, cold day.

The pictures over the beds are copies of Italian paintings of the Madonna and Child I had seen and liked. My mother and father gave us Irish linen bedspreads, which were hand-embroidered with shamrocks, thistles and other Irish symbols and were great treasures.

The photograph on Mr. Kennedy's dresser is of his mother and father. On the far wall are the traditional six-month pictures of Joe Jr., Jack, Rosemary and Kathleen. Some people say that all babies look alike, but I can tell the difference even at that age.

The nursery is just across the hall.



NURSERY

This bassinet has been used by Kennedy children and grandchildren in the years since Joe Jr. and Jack first slept in it here in the nursery. The books were a favorite pastime. Probably Jack's favorite book was King Arthur and His Knights. I was very

careful to select books which were recommended at school or by a children's bookshop. My children however, were indifferent to these edifying selections, for one of Jack's book treasures was Billy Whiskers, a story about a goat, which my mother bought in a department store. The illustrations seemed to me to be crude and the colors harsh but the boys adored the stories and delighted in the whole series, pictures and all.

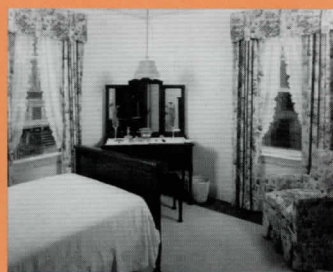
The christening dress in the corner was given to me by my mother-in-law who had it made by the Franciscan nuns in East Boston where the family lived. All the children and John Jr., the president's son, have worn this little dress. The little Irish bonnet, a gift, is profusely covered with shamrocks.

The president was baptized at Saint Aidan's, the neighborhood church. Mothers were confined for three weeks then, and so the celebration was always a small, informal family gathering. I wanted the children christened as soon as possible so I was never present at the ceremony.

There were more toys in here then of course. The president liked steam engines, teddy bears and the usual boys' toys, but especially books of adventure.

You couldn't give a sick child a radio or television set then, to keep him occupied, because there were none in 1917. We spent a lot of time reading and entertaining the children here in this room, particularly when Jack had scarlet fever in 1920.

The guest room and boudoir are down the hall.



GUESTROOM AND BOUDOIR

In a house of this size, with the number of children we had, this room alternated between being a guestroom and later a children's bedroom. In those days, it had a good clear view down the street and was a very pleasant room.

It is furnished very much like our own bedroom with the Irish linen bedspread and the silver toilet set.

I used this smaller room as a study. On the desk is one of my wedding invitations and some early photographs of my family. Here I did my correspondence and kept a card file on the children's health. That was a most helpful system. I purchased a card file from the stationers near here and recorded all the important information about each of the children. It helped so much to be able to check back on the symptoms of illness, weight, diet and all the important information, such as vaccinations, sick tests, confirmation dates et cetera. I would recommend this idea to any mother. We shall go down stairs again to the dining room, which is to your right at the bottom of the stairs.



DINING ROOM

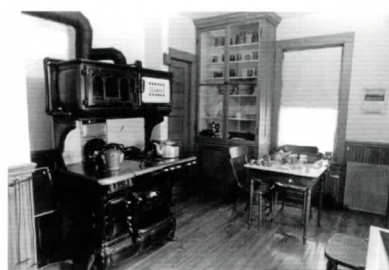
This dining room might well have been the most important room in the house for much of our family life. While they were small, the children had their meals at the table by the window. The silver napkin rings and the porringers were used by the president and his older brother and carry their monograms.

We have been fortunate to have the same dining room table, buffet, serving table and china cabinet through the years. When we moved from this house in 1921, we

gave the furniture to friends of ours, the Robert Fishers. They kept it intact and gladly gave it back to be returned to the house. The silver tea set and coffee server were wedding presents. The china was also a gift from my sister-in-law, Margaret Kennedy Burke, who painted the gold border at Notre Dame Convent when she was a student. The children never knew which one would be called upon to say grace before meals, so they were all on their toes. On holidays I remember we would discuss the events which were being commemorated, such as the battle in Lexington and Concord on April 19th. On Sundays we would talk about the gospel at Mass. If they didn't pay attention one Sunday they would the next as they knew they would be questioned.

We didn't do much formal entertaining here. We preferred to have informal dinners with a few friends. Cocktail parties were not customary in those days. A little wine or champagne was served at weddings and christenings.

The kitchen is along the hall to the right.



KITCHEN

There on the stove you see the bean pot. We always ate Boston baked beans on Saturday nights. Warmed over for Sunday morning breakfast they were perfectly delicious with brown bread.

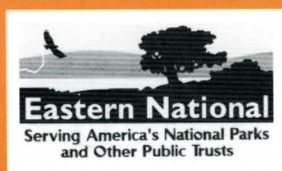
Everyone had their special recipe for Boston baked beans and piccalilli which was usually served with them.

With all the baby bottles to be sterilized, formulas to prepare, and meals to cook, this kitchen was a very busy place. During those hectic hours I would put the baby in the stroller, take two children by the hand, and with the dog following close behind, set out for the corner grocery store. On the way back we would usually stop for a visit at Saint Aidan's church. I wanted my children to realize that church was for every day in the week and not just for Sunday.

As you leave by the back door, imagine with me the laughter of these children as they played in the warm spring sun or built snowmen in the winter. I would look out of the window occasionally to see that all went well.

I hope you have enjoyed your visit to our home. We were very happy here and although we did not know about the days ahead we were enthusiastic and optimistic about the future.

John F. Kennedy National Historic Site
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